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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 004026

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SUBJECT: SYRIA HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDUP: TRIALS, TRAVEL BANS
AND DEPORTATIONS

REF: A. DAMASCUS 2263

[B](#). DAMASCUS 3488

[C](#). DAMASCUS 2391

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

[1](#). (C) Summary: The SARG continues to crack down on Syrians critical of the SARG, pursuing court cases against activists such as Ali and Mohammed Abdullah and Fateh Jammous, and restricting travel by civil society figures, according to contacts. Despite the ongoing crackdown, the Damascus Declaration group has continued to meet secretly, forming a General Secretariat with former MP Riad Seif as its elected head, contacts said. The group recently came out with a little-publicized statement in support of "the resistance" in the Israel-Hizballah conflict, in light of widespread Lebanese civilian deaths and the massive destruction in the country, one human rights organizer told us. There are reports that the SARG has deported four more Iranian-Arab Ahwazis back to Iran, including one person who was a Dutch citizen. The Acting UNHCR Representative in Damascus said he was waiting for the Syrian MFA to clarify the report. End Summary.

[2](#). (SBU) ABDULLAH TRIAL: Father-and-son activists Ali and Mohammed Abdullah were charged August 14 in Military Court with insulting Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and security officials, as well as spreading lies about Syria's economic situation. Charges against the father, Ali, were linked to economic articles he had written in regional Arabic-language papers, while charges against Mohammed were mostly connected to an interview with al-Jazira television about the then-recent arrest of his father. The President of the Paris-based Arab Commission for Human Rights, Violette Daguerre, and Tunisian human rights activist Siham Bensidine, who observed the session, said they had unsuccessfully requested from Syrian authorities official legal documents detailing charges against the Abdullahs. Lawyers Faisal Badr, Rezanne Zeituneh and Ibrahim Hakim will present the Abdullahs' defense scheduled for September 27.

[3](#). (SBU) FATEH JAMMOUS REMAINS IN CUSTODY: Communist Action Party leader Jammous appeared July 24 in criminal court on charges of publishing "false news that can diminish the nation's dignity," according to human rights contacts. (Note: In Jammous' court appearances earlier this year, interrogation focused on two public meetings Jammous held in Stockholm and London with Syrian expatriates to discuss the situation in Syria, as reported in reftel A. According to Jammous' lawyer at that time, the SARG's evidence file contained verbatim transcriptions of the discussions during

those meetings, suggesting that an audience member had recorded and passed on the recordings to SARG authorities.) During the July 24 session, the judge interrogated Jammous about an interview that he gave in London to a television channel, according to contacts. He was denied release on bail.

¶4. (C) DAMASCUS-BEIRUT DECLARATION DETAINEES: Six people who signed the Damascus-Beirut Declaration, including Syrian intellectual Michel Kilo and human rights lawyer Anwar al-Bunni, remain in Syrian prison, following the July release of four signatories. SARG authorities have made progress in efforts to persuade as many as four other jailed signatories to withdraw their signatures, not including Bunni and Kilo who remain steadfast, asserted Ammar Qurabi of the National Organization for Human Rights in Syria (NOHR in Syria). Qurabi added that he had visited Kilo in prison recently and had found him frustrated over the lack of attention to his plight and that of other political prisoners.

¶5. (C) TRAVEL BANS: The SARG has prevented in recent months civil society and human rights activists from traveling (reftel B). Although the bans are often not made public, we have heard from individuals whose travel has been banned or restricted, including the lawyers of jailed activist Kamal Labwani, Muhanned al-Hasani and Khalil Matook; Ammar Qurabi (although he recently obtained permission for a 24-hour trip to London to attend a meeting of the Aspen Institute-Germany); and civil society activist and intellectual Radwan Ziyadeh, who is also head of the Damascus Center for the Study of Human Rights (although Ziyadeh recently obtained permission to travel to Denmark to discuss the cartoon crisis.

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¶6. (C) DAMASCUS DECLARATION: Despite the ongoing crackdown, the Damascus Declaration (DD) group has continued to meet secretly, forming a General Secretariat with formerly

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detained Damascus Spring MP Riad Seif as its elected head, as well as a media committee and a follow-up committee. In the DD elections, Seif overcame fierce competition from Hasan Abdulazeem, Arab Socialist Union SYG (a small pan-Arab opposition party) and Democratic National Rally spokesman, who had to settle for membership in the Secretariat, according to new DD member and president of the banned Jamal Atassi Forum, Suheir Atassi, in a conversation with an Embassy FSN. Pressure on the group continues, however, with Syrian security shutting down a meeting earlier this month, despite members' efforts to change the location of each gathering and to communicate via vague telephone text messages, a human rights activist noted. In late July or early August, the DD issued a little-publicized statement about the Israel-Hizballah conflict in support of the Lebanese "resistance," after heated debate about whether the group should explicitly mention Hizballah, Ziyadeh said. He added that this view was widespread in Syria, even among civil society activists given the high civilian death toll in Lebanon and the widespread destruction of the country's infrastructure. (Note: Post is seeking a copy of the statement.)

7 (C) NEW AHWAZI DEPORTATIONS?: The British-based Ahwazi Friendship Society stated in a news release posted on the group's Web site that the SARG has deported back to Iran four UNHCR-recognized Ahwazi refugees who had been detained in Syria. The four refugees are: Faleh Abdullah al-Mansouri, a 60-year-old Dutch national; Gamal Obeidy, a 34-year-old student at Damascus University; and brothers Taher Ali and Abdulrasoul Ali Mazrae. UNHCR's Acting Representative Laurens Jolles told Poloff that his agency has formally requested the MFA to provide information about the whereabouts of the four refugees, indicating, however, that contrary to the Ahwazi society's report, Mansouri may have

been deported in May around the same time as Saeed Saki
(reftel C) and the others may still remain in SARG custody.
(Embassy is still awaiting MFA response to our demarche on
that deportation and plans to follow up.).

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